

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Council of the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science

Minutes of Meeting 96-5

held

Friday, 25 October 1996, at 2:00 p.m. in GM 403-2

Present: Dr. D.J. Taddeo (Chair); Dr. M.O. Ahmad; Dr. J.W. Atwood; Dr. C. Bédard; Dr. R. Bhat; Ms. C. Blaquiére (Undergrad. Rep.); Dr. J. Campanelli; Mr. R. El-Hacha (Graduate Rep.); Dr. C. Giguère; Dr. G. Gouw; Dr. K. Ha; Dr. A.M. Hanna; Ms. L. Harris (Library); Mr. D. Hinton (Undergrad. Rep.); Dr. V.S. Hoa; Dr. A. Krzyzak; Dr. C. Lam; Dr. L. Landsberger; Ms. A. Lappos (Undergrad. Rep.); Dr. E.I. Plotkin; Dr. D. Probst; Dr. A.S. Ramamurthy; Dr. T. Stathopoulos; Dr. C. Suen; Dr. J. Svoboda; Mr. T. Too (Registrar's Office); Dr. C. Trueman; Dr. G. Turski (Secretary); Dr. G. Vatistas; Dr. M. Zaheeruddin; Dr. R. Zmeureanu

Regrets: Dr. P. Fazio; Ms. S. Kiruluta; Dr. S. Rakheja; Dr. L. Tao

Guests: Mr. R. Martin; Mr. L. Zack

1. Adoption of Agenda

Motion 96-5-1 The agenda was unanimously adopted. (J. Campanelli, G. Vatistas)

2. Adoption of Minutes

Motion 96-5-2 The Minutes of Meeting 96-4 (20 September 1996) were unanimously approved. (T. Stathopoulos, S. Hoa)

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair informed Council that recently Mechanical Engineering's Dr. W. Habashi was awarded two very substantial research contracts with CAE Electronics (valued annually at \$100,000) and Pratt & Whitney (valued annually at \$155,000) respectively. Dr. Taddeo noted, and members agreed, that Dr. Habashi deserves Council's congratulations on this outstanding achievement.

As part of the accreditation process, a Visiting Team from the CEAB will be visiting the University on November 3-5 to evaluate all undergraduate engineering programmes. Dr. Taddeo expressed confidence in the Faculty's readiness to host the visit.

The next meeting of the Faculty's External Advisory Board is scheduled for the coming Wednesday, 30 October 1996. The Faculty's initiative with respect to its building project figures among the main agenda items. Dr. J. Lighstone has also been invited to speak and answer questions about his academic plan for the University, and Mr. R. Renaud will update the Advisory Board on Concordia's upcoming Capital Campaign and the specific projects that have been approved within the campaign's objectives for the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science. Dr. Taddeo promised to keep members informed about the Advisory Board's activities and thanked the unit heads in particular for their active involvement in the board.

On the information provided by Dr. Bhat, the Chair announced that Dr. S. Hoa was recently named Fellow of the American Society for Mechanical Engineers. On behalf of Council Dr. Taddeo congratulated Dr. Hoa, and a commemorative photograph of this occasion was taken by the Secretary.

CLOSED SESSION

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2. The second part of the document is a list of the topics that were discussed at the meeting.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the actions that were taken at the meeting.

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OPEN SESSION

6. Inter-University Grade Conversion (ECFC Doc. 96-5-1)

Dr. Stathopoulos provided a brief overview of the intent to institute a coherent inter-university grade conversion system. He explained that in view, especially, of the progressively greater number of Concordia's students taking courses

elsewhere in Montreal, a viable grade conversion system is needed so that students can be properly credited for those courses and their results recorded on transcripts and calculated in their Grade Point Averages. Having developed a grade conversion table encompassing the entire Quebec university network, the Academic Programmes Committee (APC) is presently seeking Concordia Faculty Councils' input and recommendations on the matter so that appropriate changes can be introduced into the Undergraduate Calendar for 1997-98. The issue of grade conversion at the graduate level was already positively dealt with by the School of Graduate Studies and the APC this past September.

Motion
96-5-8

That Council approve the proposed changes to the Undergraduate Calendar regarding inter-university grade conversion, as outlined in ECFC Doc. 96-5-1 (T. Stathopoulos, C. Bédard)

Dr. Gouw expressed a concern that in instances where a student has transcripts from two different institutions (e.g. Concordia and McGill) which indicate a different grade for the same course, an appropriate explanation of this situation (as issuing from the conversion) be provided. A further discussion revealed a number of related problems issuing from the variability of the grading systems used throughout the university systems and the consequent difficulties in establishing uniform and fair grade conversions. While there emerged no clear resolution of these issues, a consensus was reached that the proposed system is preferable to the one currently in place, whereby Concordia students succeeding in courses elsewhere receive on their (Concordia) transcripts merely a "Pass" notation, regardless of how well they do in such courses.

Vote: Carried unanimously

7. Academic Planning (ECFC Doc. 96-5-2)

The Dean asked the unit heads to report on their units' reaction to Dr. Lightstone's academic plan *Following a Course Forward*.

Dr. Hoa stated that, in regard to the Department of Mechanical Engineering, the analysis adopted in the plan seems to reflect a snapshot approach, rather than a historical-developmental one. He emphasized that the department strongly objected to the proposed faculty complement for his unit. More generally, a major flaw of the document is its neglect of the research component of the overall activities that a Concordia, as a university, must sustain. This neglect results in the discounting of the benefits to the institution in terms of additional clientele, research grant-supported student scholarships, overhead monies, grant-purchased capital equipment, and the like, while in effect also devaluing much of the effort made by the Faculty's professors. Dr. Hoa continued that the attitude towards research conveyed in the Lightstone document is especially detrimental to the research-intensive unit such as the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

In Dr. Hoa's view, an additional flaw in the planning document is an insufficiently nuanced view of programme options which are suggested for possible elimination. While, for example, an option such as that of Vehicle Engineering may have a low student enrolment, its courses are widely taken by other engineering students who need them as part of their programmes. Because these courses will still have to be offered, eliminating the option will not generate any real savings.

Speaking for the Centre for Building Studies and the Department of Civil Engineering, Dr. Ha said that he shares many of the misgivings about the academic plan expressed by Dr. Hoa. The faculty complement ceiling placed on the two units of twenty-four means a net loss of six positions and a one-fifth reduction from the current numbers. This drastic cut is particularly harmful at a time when the two units have been mandated to integrate under one administrative and management structure because it will remove the flexibility needed to effect this integration in the optimal manner. Echoing Dr. Hoa's comments about research, Dr. Ha remarked that its neglect in the document strikes particularly at CBS which was originally formed as a research unit through a Negotiated Development Grant and later supplemented by monies for positions under the Actions Structurantes programme. Concluding his remarks, Dr. Ha stated that a formal response from CBS regarding Dr. Lightstone's plan will be forwarded to the Dean in the near future.

Dr. Campanelli noted that the dramatic overall CBS/CED faculty complement reduction is at the same time contradictory to Dr. Lightstone call for the development of a new programme in Environmental Engineering. Without the requisite resources, such a programme is simply not possible.

Dr. Giguere noted that strategic academic planning is a development at Concordia that began only several years ago, only to be rather unexpectedly in the more recent past forced to factor in massive budget cuts. While the best developed plans may have to be abandoned because of dramatic changes to the University's funding, the planning exercise itself is very valuable for the assessment it offers to the institution in regard to where it presently stands and the direction it wishes to take in the future. While abstracting from the specifics of Dr. Lightstone's plan and refraining from criticizing it, Dr. Giguère emphasized the need for Engineering and Computer Science to develop alternatives to it, because in absence of such alternatives the Faculty will be unable to avoid the imposition of a plan developed for it by others. He concluded with the observation that the budget reductions to date throughout the University have been done on a *pro rata* basis and that in order to counter this the alternatives proposed by the Faculty must be informed by performance indicators.

In Dr. Lam's view, the reality of budget cuts is forcing departments to think about how to fulfil their mission and deliver programmes with diminishing resources. While judging that Dr. Lightstone's plan is accurate with regard to his

own department and its potential prospects for further development, it was also his belief that overall the plan is overly optimistic and does not face squarely the impending financial realities.

Dr. Lam added that to date the Department of Computer Science has agreed to exceed its quota of students without requesting additional resources. Should this trend continue however--as it is likely to do with the popularity of and demand in the area--the pressure to establish a level playing field not only within the University but within the Faculty as well will significantly increase. Because at present it is unknown whether (and from where) the department could secure additional resources, the unit has decided for the time being not to pursue further the expansion of its operations.

Dr. Hanna said that Dr. Ha's statement is representative of the views of, and wholly supported by, the Department of Civil Engineering, and Dr. Bhat supported Dr. Giguère's contention that budget cuts should not be applied on a *pro rata* basis--the more so since the Faculty has always worked hard to pursue new frontiers. Dr. Bhat further stressed that in actuality the various options within Mechanical Engineering do not result in overspecialization, since they are limited to only sixteen credits.

Alluding to a recently published study in *La Presse* wherein Concordia figures in only sixth place among Quebec universities in applied sciences, Dr. Zmeureanu wondered whether and how this situation would inform Concordia's academic planning. He noted as well that the apparently high percentage of administrative costs at Concordia (in relation to the total budget of the institution) as well as the high ratio of part-time instructors also deserve serious consideration in the planning process. Dr. Giguère explained that the indicated administrative costs at Concordia do not reflect current reality here and that the figures shown result from lack of a uniform method of counting such costs throughout the Quebec university system.

Dr. Stathopoulos reiterated the reservation that the setting aside of serious consideration of research is a simply untenable position for an academic plan of a contemporary university.

Concluding the discussion, Dr. Taddeo summarized briefly the planning efforts made by the Faculty to date. He explained that the overall faculty complement proposed for the University in the plan would--FALRIP notwithstanding--issue in a \$2 mln. deficit for the academic sector, and that only the monies saved from unfilled positions have allowed Concordia to meet the most recent budgets. It is clear, therefore, that additional cuts in the faculty complement will have to be effected. The Dean observed that while the Faculty's professors as a group are unquestionably Concordia's strongest performers and the Faculty's leadership has forcefully argued this fact with the aid of appropriate data, it remains an open

question whether the argument will be broadly accepted to concretely impact the eventual reallocation of resources within the University.

8. Other

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.